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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 002386

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: AMMAR AL-HAKIM SUCCEEDS FATHER AS ISCI CHAIRMAN

REF: A. BAGHDAD 002288

[1](#)B. BAGHDAD 002302

Classified By: Ambassador Christopher R. Hill for reason 1.4(d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Six days after the death of Abd al-Aziz al-Hakim, the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) Shura Council elected Hakim's eldest son, Ammar, to be ISCI's new chairman. The move was widely anticipated given the close association of the Hakim family to ISCI and the praise lavished on Ammar during funeral processions for his father. On September 1, the Ambassador visited ISCI headquarters, jam-packed with mourners and Iraqi officials, to pay condolences to Ammar and others from the Hakim family. Ammar, facing questions about his youth and inexperience, will likely seek to portray his leadership as a continuation of his father's legacy. Preparations for the planned January national election should keep ISCI focused on external challenges and, for the time being, also limit moves inside ISCI to constrain Ammar's authority. On the other hand, many observers have questioned ISCI's ability to lead the recently announced Shia-dominant Iraqi National Alliance (INA) in the absence of Abd al-Aziz al-Hakim and questioned the permanence of his son as party leader. END SUMMARY.

Ammar Elected New ISCI Chairman

[1](#)2. (U) The ISCI Shura Council unanimously elected Ammar as chairman on September 1. This decision was expected given the religious and political prominence of the Hakim family and the grooming of Ammar for the position since his late father was diagnosed with cancer in 2007. During Abd al-Aziz's funeral procession across southern Iraq this week, mourners carried photos of Ammar along with his deceased ancestors: Abd al-Aziz, Muhammad Baqir, and Grand Ayatollah Muhsin al-Hakim. On August 30, outside a shrine in the Shia holy city of Najaf, Ammar publicly read Abd al-Aziz's will, which announced Ammar as "my guardian after my death. In view of my personal knowledge of him and overseeing his upbringing, I testify that he is trustworthy and honest and possesses the competence and experience to handle religious, political and social matters."

[1](#)3. (U) During the Shura Council's press conference announcing the ascension, Ammar acknowledged ISCI's "setbacks" during the 2009 provincial elections, subtly called for PM Maliki to join the newly-formed, Shia-led INA (ref A), and advocated openness with Iraq's neighbors "like Iran and Turkey." (Note: INA can also be translated as Iraqi National Coalition. Because the group itself uses INA in its English language materials, post will follow suit. End note.)

Ambassador's Condolence Call Amid the Masses

[1](#)4. (SBU) The Ambassador and Pol MC earlier on September 1 attended condolence ceremonies at the ISCI compound in Baghdad amid masses of mourners and numerous Iraqi officials. The crowds, numbering well over 1,000, carried black banners

lauding the late Abd al-Aziz and periodically chanted for Ammar's success. The usual five-minute ride from the edge of the International Zone to the compound took 40 minutes because of the vehicle and pedestrian traffic.

15. (SBU) The mosque was jam-packed with condolence callers, despite Baghdad's 110-plus degree heat. Upon entering the teeming, chaotic mosque, the Ambassador was escorted to greet Ammar, his younger brother Muhsin, and clerical descendants of the Hakim family. Ammar stood at the front of the line to receive all visitors. Muhsin thanked the Ambassador for the assistance the United States provided in offering initial medical care to his father. (Note: Abd al-Aziz's cancer was first detected in a Texas hospital. End note.) Foreign Minister Hoshiyar Zebari, numerous members of parliament, and other foreign diplomats were in attendance. The chief of staff to the late Abd al-Aziz told Poloff that ISCI had to extend the hours of the three-day condolence event to accommodate all the visitors. The ISCI-affiliated satellite television station al-Furat broadcast the gathering live.

Comment: Ammar to Show Continuity

16. (C) To consolidate his authority within ISCI and fend off challenges from its old guard (ref B), Ammar probably will demonstrate ISCI's continuity by regularly referring back to the Hakim legacy--whether his father or his uncle, Muhammad Baqir, ISCI's founder. Major reforms are unlikely before the January election as Ammar and other ISCI leaders will be focused on managing the split between the ISCI-Sadrism led INA and PM Maliki's nascent electoral coalition. Ammar might

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cede intra-INA issues to Humam Hamoudi, a member of the ISCI old guard appointed by Abd al-Aziz to negotiate ISCI's alliances. Hamoudi, a potential challenger to Ammar, is known to be more sympathetic to the Iranian government. ISCI has a decades-long rivalry with the anti-U.S. Sadrism Trend and may be able to use its tested relationship with Sunni and Kurdish parties to limit the Sadrism role in the next government. Others fear, however, that if Ammar provides weak leadership or is seriously challenged by Hamoudi and intra-party fissures rise to the surface, then ISCI will have less bargaining power to work against Sadrism demands for government posts in the event of a strong INA showing in the January polls. End comment.

HILL